

The bill improves outreach and assistance to Medicare beneficiaries and providers and includes contracting reforms to consolidate Medicare claims processing. The bill is sponsored by Rep. Pete Stark, the Ranking Member of the subcommittee, and Rep. Nancy Johnson, the Subcommittee Chair.

“It is a pleasure to work together as a united subcommittee on issues of mutual concern,” Rep. Stark said. “This bill improves the program for providers, beneficiaries and taxpayers. The core of the bill will reduce provider burden and improve regulatory processes in Medicare. I am pleased that we’ve accomplished this goal while working closely with the HHS Inspector General, CMS and GAO to assure that this legislation in no way reduces the government’s ability to fight waste, fraud and abuse.”

Rep. Stark continued: “Our bill enacts important, long-overdue Medicare contractor reforms to get a better deal for the program, while maintaining quality services and fulfilling performance goals.”

The bill has several provisions to improve services to Medicare beneficiaries. The legislation establishes a system to transfer administrative law judges (ALJs) from the Social Security Administration to HHS to improve the ALJ system for Medicare beneficiaries and providers. The bill stations Medicare staff at Social Security field offices nationwide to help beneficiaries with Medicare questions. It also creates a beneficiary ombudsman program to give beneficiaries a voice within the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and to enable CMS to better respond to beneficiary needs.

Finally, the bill completes bipartisan action to protect nurses and health care workers from needle-stick injuries by requiring the use of safe needle technology. The bill closes a loophole in the law that leaves a segment of public hospitals out of the protections. Rep. Stark said: “The same standards used to protect health care workers in the private sector should certainly apply to public health care workers. This provision will save lives and is an important addition to the bill.”

Rep. Stark concluded: “Although there are many Medicare issues on which I disagree with my colleagues across the aisle, I am pleased that we can work together on these measures to improve Medicare for beneficiaries and providers. I look forward to seeing this bill receive quick approval by the House and Senate, and for the President to sign it into law.”